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ABSTRACT

The writing of five consecutive classes of first grade students was analyzed to investigate the selection of topic, theme, and mode in six-year-old children learning to read and write through the use of an invented spelling approach in an open classroom. The writing studied was in the form of 993 "books" (several sheets of paper stapled together, with covers of construction paper) written by 51 children. Case studies of four students, and observations and interviews in the classroom also provided data. The findings showed that children wrote often about holidays, animals, themselves, and school activities. Influences from television and movies were noted in many of their books. Boys wrote often about sports, war, fighting, and catastrophes, while girls wrote more frequently about themselves, their feelings, their families, and friendships. An early progression toward narrative writing was found for both sexes, with a general tendency for children to write more narratives as the first grade year progressed. A general conclusion was that development in early writing involved moving away from the egocentrism of young children. (Samples of student narratives are appended.) (HOD)

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A LEPRECHAUN IN KING ARTHUR'S COURT

TOPIC, THEME AND MODE IN THE WRITING

OF FIRST GRADERS USING INVENTED SPELLING

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The study investigated the writing of five consecutive classes of first graders in an open classroom using Invented Spelling as an approach to both reading and writing. Procedures included identification of topic, theme, territory and mode in 993 books written by 51 children, analysis of trends in the development of writing through the first grade year, four case studies, and a study of the origins of topic selection through classroom observations, discussions with teacher and children, and maintenance of writing records. Common topics included holidays, animals, home and school activities, with many TV and movie themes. Marked sex differences were noted, with boys writing most often in secondary territory and girls in primary. Both sexes began the year with non-narrative writing, gradually increasing their use of the narrative mode. Early stages of development of narrative writing were identified.

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CS 209 229

A LEPRECHAUN IN KING ARTHUR'S COURT: TOPIC, THEME AND MODE IN THE WRITING OF FIRST GRADERS USING INVENTED SPELLING

One fall day several years ago, I visited a first grade in which children were all engaged in the writing process. As I walked around that classroom I observed in fascination their enthusiasm and their involvement in their work. Some were drawing pictures, some were talking to each other, some were writing letters which went from right to left, or curled around the edges of the page. All were using Invented Spelling. This was a classroom in which the children were learning to write before they knew how to read, and were learning to read through the writing process.

That visit began a collaboration which culminated in the study reported here. Mrs. Jeanette Amidon, the teacher of that first grade, saved for five years all of the writing done by her first graders, for use in the study. During those years, I visited frequently in her room, was able to interview children, to observe them at work, and to converse often with the teacher.

The writing done by these first graders was unusual for at least two reasons. They were able to write freely because they were not inhibited by the need for correct spelling, and they were free to write about whatever they chose.

The purpose of the study was to investigate the children's selection of topic, theme and mode, and to trace the development of the writing through the first grade year.

According to King and Rentel (1979), "Writing research has seldom been conducted below the third grade" (p. 243). This has been for the simple reason that until rather recently it has been assumed that children younger than second or third grade could not write.

Graves (1973, 1975) analyzed the writing of seven year olds, categorizing their writing in terms of territory. Primary territory was defined as writing about matters close at hand, such as home, family and school. Secondary territory referred to the larger metropolitan area; it included sports and local events outside the home. Extended territory included events of national or international scope, such as world wars, elections and space exploration. Graves reported that boys wrote more often in secondary and extended territory than did girls, who usually wrote in primary territory. The girls wrote more reflectively about their personal experience and feelings, whereas boys did not tend to write about themselves or to explore their feelings or reactions to the events described.

Chomsky (1971, 1979) and Read (1976) have described the approach to early writing called Invented Spelling, in which children are allowed to write without initial correction of their spelling or punctuation. The use of Invented Spelling

in classrooms has made it possible for young children to write much more than was previously thought possible.

Bissex (1980) reported on the reading and writing development of her son, recording his early invented spellings and tracing the development of both his reading and his writing through the elementary grades. The forms of her son's writing in first grade included signs, labels, captions, stories, little books, directions, lists or catalogues, newspapers, notes, letters, greeting cards, riddles and rhymes. Bissex commented, "We may need to look beyond the classifications currently used for adult writings in order to understand the forms and functions of young children's writing" (p. 36).

Graves and his researchers at the Writing Process Laboratory in New Hampshire (Graves, 1981) spent two years in an NIE- funded project studying the writing process in a setting which allowed Invented Spelling for beginning writing. Calkins (1980) found that for beginning first graders, writing is play. As with children's early artwork, the process is all that matters; the product, and the audience, are initially of little concern to the child. The NIE study (Graves, 1981) also found that "Behaviors of writers are ideosyncratic and highly variable" (p. 29).

Graves (1981, 1982, 1983) has frequently emphasized the importance of topic choice, stating "More needs to be studied about topic choice because it probably has much more to

do with subsequent behaviors in writing than we know" (1981, p. 5). He urges that children be given the opportunity to select their own topics for writing.

What do first graders write about when they are free to select their own topics? Sowers (1979a, 1979b) reported that beginning first graders did not write narratives at first. Defining narrative as anything in chronological order, she reported the following percentages of narratives for a first grade class through the year: November, 36%; December, 60%; January, 50%; February, 64%; March, 78%; April, 100%; May (and part of June), 78%. Sowers also found that the children wrote "attribute" books, which she defined as books "all about" something. Sowers suggested, "Young writers' changing preferences in their mode of writing remain to be confirmed in another first grade classroom with similar or dissimilar writing instruction" (1979b, p. 15).

Halliday has said, "Text is choice" (1977, p. 123). Choice of topic is one of the first and most important choices any writer must make in producing text. The major focus of this study was on choice of topic by first graders who were writing freely in a setting in which they were allowed to make that choice.

The Study

The classroom studied is in an upper-middle class suburban neighborhood. The reading program used in this class may best be compared with a language experience approach, the difference being that the children write their own books rather than dictating them to an adult. The writing studied was in the form of "books" which typically consisted of several sheets of paper stapled together, with covers of construction paper. Children in the study wrote an average of 19 books per year; they were free to select their own topics for these books. All books written by five groups of first graders from 1977-1982 were available for the study.

The research questions were:

1. When first graders using Invented Spelling are free to select their own writing topics, how may their writing be characterized in terms of:
   a) Topic
   b) Underlying theme
   c) Territoriality
   d) Use of person
   e) Mode of discourse (narrative vs. non-narrative)?
2. What are the differences between boys and girls in choice of topic, theme and mode?
3. How does the choice of mode change through the course of the first grade year?

4. How does the writing develop through the year in terms of treatment and development of topic?
5. What are the factors in the classroom environment which influence the choice of topic?

This was an exploratory, non-statistical study which included a process component as well as analysis of written products. The investigation was divided into four parts:

1. Summaries of group data. All books written during the first grade year by two classes of children were analyzed in order to identify for each the topic, underlying themes or references, mode, territoriality, and use of person. Mode was divided into narrative or non-narrative, with narrative defined as anything in chronological order. Territoriality was divided into primary, secondary and extended. This analysis was done on 993 books written by 30 boys and 21 girls. A compilation of topics was made, for the total group and by sex. This was also done for underlying themes and references. Data for mode, territoriality and use of person were summarized by sex, for each class and for the total group.
2. Trends through the year and types of writing. The group data were investigated in order to learn what the percentages of narrative and non-narrative writing were at two month intervals throughout the year. Also, trends in the development of narrative writing

were identified, and samples were provided of typical kinds of writing noted in each mode.

3. Case studies. Four case studies were done, two of children representative of the boys and the girls, respectively, one of a child who wrote little and one of a child who wrote a great deal of poetry.
4. Topic Selection. In the spring of 1982, the researcher visited regularly in the classroom for three months, observing the class and engaging in informal discussions with the children and teacher about the process of topic selection. In addition, charts were kept of the daily writing of each child. These charts were studied in order to determine whether peer influence on topic selection could be noted. Selected topics were traced through a group of six boys and a group of five girls for the three month period.

Findings

Topic. The most frequently selected topics were holidays, including Halloween, Thanksgiving, Christmas, Channukah, Valentine's Day, St. Patrick's Day and Easter. Children also wrote frequently about themselves, school, animals, nature, and topics generated by school activites. Many books showed the influence of television and movies; children wrote about such topics as Star Wars, Jaws, spooks,

mummies, vampires, King Kong, Dracula, Frosty the Snowman, Pooh and Snoopy.

A major finding was the marked difference noted between the sexes in topic selection. Girls wrote frequently about animals, themselves, flowers, nature and the seasons, school, family and friends. (Table 1)

Boys wrote most often about sports, and selected many violent topics such as fighting in space, wars, Spiderman, Dracula, fires and explosions. (Table 2)

Though both sexes wrote on some themes, no girls wrote on the boys' two most frequently selected topics--sports and Star Wars themes. Girls wrote often about their friendships, and about marriage and having babies; these topics were rarely selected by boys.

When boys and girls wrote on the same topic, such as the Camelot theme introduced by a class play, they often gave it distinctly different treatments. For example, the boys wrote often about King Arthur's knights fighting and killing each other, while the girls often wrote about the marriage of Guinevere to King Arthur and the home life of Arthur and Guinevere.

Underlying Themes and References. The books of both girls and boys had many underlying themes and references to self and family. Other than that, the difference between the sexes in this area was so marked that it is misleading to summarize the data for the group as a whole.

TABLE 1

Main Topics Most Often Chosen by Girls

No. of Girls: 20 No. of Books with Main Topics: 378

Main Topic of Book	Percent of All Topics Chosen by Girls
Christmas, Channukah, Easter, etc.	12.7%
Animals (own pets, small animals, horses)	10.1
Flowers, nature, seasons	7.2
Self	6.9
Snoopy, Frosty, Pooh, Hollie Hobbie	5.3
School, teachers	5.0
Witches, spooks (apart from Halloween)	5.0
Camelot, princesses, kings, queens	4.3
Family	4.0
Friends	4.0
Halloween	4.0
Food	3.4
Trips, other places	3.2
Thanksgiving	2.9
Leprechauns, elves, Easter bunny	2.6
Funny things, jokes, riddles	1.9
Principal of school (25th year)	1.6
Monster (based on Monster books)	1.6
Non-print (musical notes, numbers)	1.6
Santa & Rudolph (no ref. to Christmas)	1.3
Valentine's Day	1.1
Feelings (being happy, angry, etc.)	1.0
Dancing, ballet, gymnastics	1.0
Other (less than 1% frequency)	8.3
Total	100.0

The most common underlying themes and references for the girls were feelings, self, friends, family, marriage and babies, and school. For the boys, the outstanding themes were war, fighting and killing. The boys also wrote many

TABLE 2

Main Topics Most Often Chosen by Boys

No. of Boys: 31 No. of Books with Main Topics: 467

Main Topic of Book	Percent of All Topics Chosen by Boys
Sports	12.2%
Space, rockets, Star Wars themes	9.0
Christmas, Channukah, Easter, etc.	8.8
Camelot themes (King Arthur, Sir Lancelot, knights, castles)	6.4
Vampires, mummies, robots	4.5
Halloween	4.3
Santa & Rudolph (no ref. to Christmas)	3.4
Animals (including zoo, dinosaurs)	3.2
School, teachers	3.2
Sea, divers, boating, fishing	3.2
Snoopy, Frosty, Hollie Hobbie	3.2
Vehicles	3.0
Thanksgiving	3.0
War, fighting, killing	2.6
King Kong, Dracula, Spiderman, Batman, Superman, Swarm	2.4
Self	2.1
School principal (25th year)	2.1
Leprechauns, Easter bunny	2.1
Fires, explosions, tidal waves, Jaws	2.1
Cowboys, Indians, pirates, robbers	1.9
Monster (based on Monster books)	1.9
Retelling book, poem or movie	1.5
Family, family life, relationships	1.5
Flowers, nature, seasons	1.5
Trips, other places	1.5
Adventures, mysteries, magic (being in trouble, overcoming)	1.3
Machines, weapons	1.3
Possessions (toys, money)	1.0
Other (less than 1% frequency)	5.8
Total	100.0

books in which the theme of the story was being in trouble

and overcoming that trouble. (Table 3)

TABLE 3

Most Common Underlying Themes or References

Percent of observations, by sex and for total group

	Boys	Girls	Total
Total Numbers of Observations	143	198	341
War, fighting, killing	39.2%	3.0%	18.2%
Feelings	4.9	19.7	13.5
Self	6.3	11.1	9.0
Family	6.3	7.8	7.0
Being in trouble, overcoming (magic, mysteries, fairy tales)	11.2	4.0	7.0
Friends	1.4	9.1	5.9
Marriage, having babies	.7	7.8	4.7
School, teachers	2.0	6.6	4.7
Funny things, jokes, riddles	1.4	4.0	3.0
Beach, swimming	2.1	3.5	3.0
Animals	1.4	3.5	2.7
Trips, other places	2.8	1.5	2.0
Flowers, nature, seasons	---	3.0	1.8
Fire, explosions, tidal waves	4.2	---	1.8
Injury, illness, pain	2.1	1.5	1.8
Birthdays, birthday parties	.7	2.0	1.5
Good, bad behavior	2.8	.5	1.5
Food	---	1.5	1.2
Witches, spooks, vampires, mummies	.7	1.5	1.2
Other (less than 1% frequency)	9.8	8.4	8.5
Totals	100.0	100.0	100.0

Territoriality. Boys wrote more often in secondary territory; 67% of their books were on secondary topics. Girls wrote more often in primary territory, with 54% of

their books on primary topics. Very few books were in extended territory; there was no marked difference between the sexes in preference for extended territory. (Table 4)

TABLE 4

Territory and Mode - All Girls and All Boys

GIRLS (N=21)	Narr.	Non-Narr.	Mixed	Totals
Primary	102 (24%)	124 (30%)	1 (0%)	227 (54%)
Secondary	72 (17%)	90 (21%)	--- ---	162 (38%)
Mixed Prim.-Sec.	3 (1%)	19 (5%)	1 (0%)	23 (6%)
Extended	4 (1%)	5 (1%)	--- ---	9 (2%)
Totals	181 (43%)	238 (57%)	2 (0%)	421 (100%)
BOYS (N=30)	Narr.	Non-Narr.	Mixed	Totals
Primary	65 (13%)	54 (11%)	--- ---	119 (24%)
Secondary	185 (38%)	149 (30%)	--- ---	334 (68%)
Mixed Prim.-Sec.	6 (1%)	20 (4%)	1 (0%)	27 (5%)
Extended	12 (2%)	5 (1%)	--- ---	17 (3%)
Totals	268 (54%)	228 (46%)	1 (0%)	497 (100%)

Person. Corresponding with the sex difference in territoriality was the fact that, although both sexes wrote more often in third person than in first, this tendency was more pronounced for the boys, who wrote in the third person 73% of the time. Girls wrote in the third person 46% of the time. (Table 5)

Mode. Over the entire group, there was a relatively even balance between narrative and non-narrative writing. No particular differences between the sexes were noted here; however, a difference between the two first grade classes was found. It was noted not only that individual children had strong preferences for certain modes, but also that certain class activities tended to generate writing in given modes. For instance, books about the principal written by many children at the time of a 25th anniversary celebration were often non-narrative attribute books, or books "about" the principal. Books written on the Camelot theme, on the other hand, were almost always narratives.

Trends through the Year. It was found that most children went through an identifiable early progression in their writing, as follows:

1. Unreadable books. Some children's first efforts could not be read at all unless an adult had transcribed the text at the time of writing.

TABLE 5

Use of Person

1977-8	Girls	Boys	Total
First	55 (27%)	29 (18%)	84 (23%)
Third	100 (49%)	111 (69%)	211 (58%)
Mixed	48 (24%)	20 (13%)	68 (19%)
Totals	203 (100%)	160 (100%)	363 (100%)
1978-9	Girls	Boys	Total
First	63 (45%)	28 (13%)	91 (25%)
Third	58 (42%)	167 (75%)	225 (63%)
Mixed	18 (13%)	26 (12%)	44 (12%)
Totals	139 (100%)	221 (100%)	360 (100%)
Total Group	Girls	Boys	Total
First	118 (35%)	57 (15%)	175 (24%)
Third	158 (46%)	278 (73%)	436 (60%)
Mixed	66 (19%)	46 (12%)	112 (16%)
Totals	342 (100%)	381 (100%)	723 (100%)

2. Non-narrative books with no single topic or theme.

At first these were usually collections of labelled pictures. Next the pictures were described with sentences. Some children then wrote books with titles suggesting a topic, but did not actually remain on the given topic during the course of the book.

3. Non-narrative books with one main topic. These books stayed on one topic, but did not have any identifiable sequence, plot or other organizing pattern. (For example, such a book might have many pictures of scary things, each with captions, or many pictures of fighting in space, or might be "All About Me," telling many things about the child.)

After this early progression, both narrative and non-narrative types of writing were noted. The percentage of narratives written by all children was calculated at two-month intervals throughout the first grade year. This percentage fluctuated from month to month, but a generally upward trend was noted, from 20% in September and October to 74% in May and June. (Table 6)

The sharpest increase in narrative writing was noted early in the first part of the year, between the first two time periods. Therefore, particular attention was paid to the early development of narrative writing during those fall months.

A very early type of narrative writing was identified and called "intended narrative." Intended narratives gave

TABLE 6

Percent of Narratives through the Year

	Boys		Girls		Group	
	# of Books	% Narr.	# of Books	% Narr.	# of Books	% Narr.
1977-8						
Sept.-Oct.	132	12%	148	13%	280	13%
Nov.-Dec.	40	78	33	70	73	74
Jan.-Feb.	22	59	21	52	43	56
Mar.-Apr.	35	66	34	47	69	55
May-June	7	45	20	60	27	55
1978-9						
Sept.-Oct.	69	48%	39	23%	108	39%
Nov.-Dec.	70	66	39	51	109	61
Jan.-Feb.	37	70	22	77	59	73
Mar.-Apr.	61	87	40	85	101	86
May-June	21	95	21	76	42	86
All						
Sept.-Oct.	201	24%	187	15%	388	20%
Nov.-Dec.	110	70	72	60	182	66
Jan.-Feb.	59	66	43	65	102	66
Mar.-Apr.	96	79	74	54	170	68
May-June	28	82	41	68	69	74

the distinct impression that the child thought he was telling a story. They often used "story" language such as "Once upon a time" or "happily ever after." Furthermore, they provided enough chronological sequence so that they could be classed as narratives. The following characteristics were typical of the intended narrative:

1. They could not be understood without reference to the pictures or without some prior knowledge of the story on the part of the reader.
2. They often used dialogue to carry the plot, with no intervening descriptions or explanations.
3. They often used present tense to describe past events.
4. They often slipped away from the story into first person.

Many narratives throughout the year continued to have these characteristics; growth consisted largely of moving gradually away from them. However, the distinguishing characteristic of the narrative, as opposed to the intended narrative, was that it could be understood without reference to pictures or previous knowledge of the story.

For the first eight weeks of the year, the percentages of non-narratives with no topic, non-narratives with a single topic, intended narratives, and narratives, were plotted at bi-weekly intervals. The percentages clearly showed the progression which has been outlined. When intended narra-

tives and narratives were grouped together as narrative writing, the percentage of narratives for each of the four two week periods was: 5%, 12%, 33%, 42%. (See Table 7)

TABLE 7

Progression towards Narrative Writing - Early Fall

Percent of each type of book written in each time period				
	Sept. 1-15	Sept. 16-30	Oct. 16-31	Oct. 16-31
Non-Narr. No Theme	76%	23%	12%	9%
Non-Narr. One Theme	19%	65%	55%	49%
Intended Narr.	4%	8%	27%	33%
Narr.	1%	4%	6%	9%
Totals	100%	100%	100%	100%
Totals, Intended Narr. & Narr.	5%	12%	33%	42%

It should be emphasized that there were great individual differences noted. Some children wrote narratives early, while others moved into narrative writing much later in the year. Children often seemed to have strong individual pref-

erences for one mode. However, most did move through the general stages noted, with fluctuations in individual progress the norm.

After the early period, children wrote both narratives and non-narratives of many types. Common types of narrative writing were:

1. Personal narratives. These recounted an experience of the child, or of his family or friends. These were either realistic or imaginary.
2. Sports narratives. These recounted a sporting event, often in detail.
3. Historical narratives. These were most often retellings of the Thanksgiving story.
4. Stories. These took many forms--adventures, fairy tales, mysteries, etc.

The types of writing noted are summarized in Table 8. Samples of the writing are presented in the Appendix.

Typical non-narrative writing took the following forms:

1. Attribute books. These were books "about" something or someone.
2. "Picture album." These were not so much a type as a style of writing which had the sound of a person showing a photo album to a friend, describing each picture.
3. List or catalogue. These took many forms, from lists of animals or birds, to lists of things a child liked or could do.

4. Instructions. These included books on how to make things, how to do something, and recipes.
5. Information. These were often related to something studied at school, as for example, books providing information about Japan.
6. Riddles, jokes.
7. Poetry
8. Essay, commentary.

The types of writing noted are summarized in Table 8. Samples of the writing are included in the Appendix.

TABLE 8

Types of Writing

Unreadable	
Non-Narrative - No Single Topic	
Non-Narrative - One Theme	
Narrative	Non-Narrative
Intended Narrative "Scenes from" Dialogue only Narrative slipping into first person Narrative Personal narrative Sports narrative Historical narrative Stories (mysteries, fairy tales, adventures)	Attribute ("about" something) "Picture album" List or catalogue Instructions (including recipes) Information Riddles, jokes Poetry Essay, commentary

Case Studies. Space will not permit the case study data to be presented here. However, these data emphasized the strong individual differences which were noted throughout the study.

Topic Selection. Classroom observations and discussions with teachers and children yielded the following findings regarding the origins of topic selection:

1. The children were influenced in their choice of topics by their peers. They worked together and discussed and read their books with each other. The peer influence was of two types, writing on a topic because "everyone was doing it," or selecting a topic because one had admired a friend's book or become interested in that topic because of the friend's interest in it.
2. Children frequently thought of topics while at home; they mentioned happenings at home, TV and books as sources of ideas for their writing.
3. School activities and items studied at school were frequent sources of topics.
4. The teacher's decision to publish books on certain topics was sometimes an inducement to write on those topics.
5. The teacher occasionally made overt efforts to move children away from topics they seemed to have stayed with too long, but she was not always successful in

such efforts. Her influence was more noticeable in the quality of the writing within the books than in the actual selection of the topics.

6. The children, accustomed to choosing their own topics, often wrote on what interested them even when using a book designed for a certain theme. Thus, using a shamrock-shaped green-covered book intended for St. Patrick's Day, two children wrote "Cars" and "A Leprechaun in King Arthur's Court".

It was also found that children's writing grew out of their drawing and talking. The teacher noted that early in the year it seemed particularly important for the children to draw first. This was still true for many children in the spring; they drew the pictures first, almost as though they were waiting to see what the story would be about. However, by spring, others planned their stories in advance, some using a table of contents as an outline. Some children began to write stories without pictures during the spring months.

The study of the records kept on children's writing during the spring months of 1982 revealed that it was possible to trace the course of certain topics through the group and discern peer influence on topic selection. A topic sometimes was picked up by a friend rather quickly; in other instances a topic would spread after publication of the book, some time after the first book had been written.

There were trend-setters in the group, and others who followed trends, but some children wrote on topics of their own without following the group. Though the girls wrote frequently about friendship, it was the boys who seemed most swayed by their friends in the matter of topic choice. Many of the boys were swept by a "Celtics fever" until they wrote of little else. The sex differences found in the group study were even more extreme in this group. Virtually no common topics were noted between the girls and the boys, even though boys and girls often worked together and read each other's stories. A sample list of titles from the peer group study is provided in the Appendix.

Discussion

It has been assumed by many that studies of writing could not begin until second grade or older, because first graders could not write. It is clear from this study that, with the Invented Spelling approach, first graders can and do write, and have much to say.

This study was exploratory and non-statistical in nature; yet the findings both support and are supported by the literature in written language development. The sex differences noted in this study were consistent with those reported by Graves in his study of seven year olds in New Hampshire. Sowers had reported that non-narrative writing came first, with a gradual increase in the percentage of narra-

tive writing in the first grade year. This study yielded similar results.

The egocentrism of young children was an outstanding characteristic of the writing studied. In fact, the characteristics of the intended narrative are largely expressions of that egocentrism. The child expects the reader to understand what he has written. Growth toward narrative writing was for the most part a growth away from that egocentrism, to produce writing that could be understood on its own. The frequent slipping into first person was another indication of the intrusion of the child's self into the writing, and the failure of the child to be able to take the reader's point of view.

In spite of the difficulty of the writing task, one of the most noticeable features of the classroom studied was the children's enthusiasm for their writing. It is unfortunately all too rare to see such enthusiasm for the writing process, among adults or children. It seems likely that the opportunity to explore the language for oneself without fear of failure and to write about topics of one's own choosing are important contributors to this enthusiasm. The children are active participants in their own learning, and they place themselves at their own instructional level.

Strong individual styles were noted among the children. In more traditional first grade programs it is difficult to note such styles. Allowing children the freedom to select

their own topics allows them the opportunity to develop in individual ways. This opportunity is most probably another reason for the active involvement and enthusiasm noted in the children at work.

It has been a continuing concern of American educators that boys so frequently have difficulty in learning to read. The topics selected by the boys in this study were markedly different from those to be found in any typical first grade reading materials. First grade reading materials do not usually deal with sporting events, with wars, with battles in space, fires, or other catastrophes. In contrast, typical early reading materials do often deal with the topics chosen by the girls in this study. It is worth at least questioning whether the reading materials usually provided to young boys are not of interest to them. With so much on television which does capture their interest, the typical reading fare may seem even less captivating to young boys.

Limitations of the Study

This study was exploratory in nature, and non-statistical. Though data were summarized and percentages calculated, it should be remembered that no statistical tests of significance were performed. The numbers presented should not be taken as absolute, but only as indications of tendencies or trends in the data.

The study was done in a single classroom in a suburban school. The classroom was an unusual one, with an unusual teacher. Children in other socioeconomic settings, or indeed in other classrooms in the very same school, might write very differently. This study can only describe what was done by a certain group of children. It is not intended to suggest that these findings can be generalized to all children, but only to suggest that trends noticed in this group might be found in other groups as well.

The data were viewed subjectively by a single researcher. Other researchers looking at the very same data might well perceive it differently and draw different conclusions.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study was only a scratch on the surface of an immense area waiting to be explored. The following are a few of the related questions which merit study.

1. If similar investigations were performed in other locations, at other socioeconomic levels, would similar trends be noted?
2. Is a tendency towards early or late progression towards narrative writing related to other abilities in children?
3. Is a preference for the narrative or non-narrative mode related to developmental stages, or to certain learning styles?

4. Some classrooms use Invented Spelling as an approach to writing in combination with other approaches to reading instruction. Would similar trends in the writing and in topic selection be noted in such classrooms?
5. This investigation did not consider the children's developing ability to read as they learned to write. What relationships exist between these two abilities in this classroom? in other classrooms?
6. This study did not compare children's oral language abilities with their written language development. What would be the relationship between stories told orally by children and their written products as they progressed through the first grade year?

This study has shown that there is much of interest to be learned from an investigation of the writing of young children. It is to be hoped that others will pursue the above and related questions.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to investigate selection of topic, theme and mode in the writing of six-year-old children learning to read and write through the use of an Invented Spelling approach in an open classroom. The study was exploratory and non-statistical in nature. The research included an analysis of 993 books written by 51 children,

case studies of four students, and observations and interviews in the classroom.

The children wrote often about holidays, animals, themselves and school activities; influences from television and movies were noted in many of their books. Peer influence was also found to be an important factor in topic selection.

Sharp differences between the sexes were noted in selection of topic and territory. Boys wrote often in secondary territory, about sports, war, fighting and catastrophes. Girls wrote more frequently in primary territory, discussing themselves, their feelings, their families and friendships.

An early progression toward narrative writing was found for both sexes, with a general tendency for children to write more narratives as the first grade year progressed. Several types of writing were noted in both the narrative and non-narrative modes. A general conclusion was that development in early writing involved moving away from the egocentrism of young children.

Earlier researchers had often assumed that the writing of six-year-olds could not be studied because six-year-olds simply could not write enough. With the use of the Invented Spelling approach to early writing, it was noted that six-year-olds could, and did, write enthusiastically. Their early writing developed from their drawing and conversations, and the Invented Spelling approach allowed them to be

active participants in their own learning, without fear of failure. It was concluded that these six-year-olds did indeed have a great deal to say, and that the writing of young children merits further investigation.

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APPENDIX

LIST OF TITLES - GIRL IN PEER INFLUENCE STUDY

The Leprechaun's Wedding
The Party
The Smurf Parade
The Spring Vacation
The Rainbow
The Rose and the Four-Leaf Clover
The Dog Who Ran Away
Miss Piggy and Kermit
The Circus
Me and My New Cat Snowflake
Reader Rabbit
Butterflies

LIST OF TITLES - BOY IN PEER INFLUENCE STUDY

The Celtics and St. Patrick's Day
Basketball Book
The Celtics
The New York Knicks
Celtics vs. Lakers
Jazz vs. Nuggets
Spurs Lose by Seattle
The Lakers Lose by Boston
76ers Beat Los Angeles
Celtics Beat 76ers by 40 Points
The 76ers Have the Best Team in the NBA
Rabbit Finds a Frog
The Celtics Lose Over Victory
Celtics Strike Again
The House of Garfield
The Turtle and the Pig
76ers Best of the NBA

INVENTED SPELLING

Invented Spelling is an approach to early writing in which children sound out words for themselves and write without concern for standard spelling.

Typical Stages:

1. The use of initial consonants to represent entire words
2. The use of first and final consonants: hs for "house"
3. A first effort at inserting a vowel sound: chekn for "chicken"
4. Standard spelling

Common Spellings

1. h for "ch": hrh for "church"
2. r and l as final syllables: tabl for "table" or ladr for "letter"
3. use of vowel names mt for "empty" or lad for "lady"
4. omission of nasals: tak for "tank" or wat for "went"
5. ch for initial "t": chrubl for "trouble"
6. overgeneralization of spelling rules just learned: placement of apostrophes or silent e's on all words; spellings such as selebreight for "celebrate"

NON-NARRATIVE NO THEME

Cover: AliSon

1. RB
(Rainbow)

2. AEIOUY
FL
(AEIOUY Flower)

3. HS
AliSon
(House Alison)

4. ME

5. FL
(Flower)

6. F
(Forest)

7. RBO
(Rainbow)

8. SW
(read to teacher as "Charlotte's spider web")

9. Ch
(Church)

NON-NARRATIVE SINGLE THEME

Cover: The SKErE Sinez
(The Scary Things)

1. Tha r
Going to
Tha Moon
(They are going to the moon.)(Pictures of witches on broomsticks)

3. JrKLa EZs
SEPEINg.
(Dracula is sleeping.)

4. Va Pkn EZ
on fir.
(The pumpkin is on fire.)

5. Va Sa sklt
Ezs An Jal.
(The skeleton is in jail.)

6. ThE Bat iz
KaGrt hE
Hos
(The bat is capturing the house.)

INTENDED NARRATIVE

Cover: WAR-WAR-2
(World War II)

1. the Germeins AR
weNiNg.
(The Germans are winning.)

2. Now - the - AerciNs AR
WeiNiNG.
(Now the Americans are winning.)

3. The JerMeiNs - AR
LOSiNG !
(The Germans are losing!)

4. The tANK'S Are
BLASTING.
(The tanks are blasting.)

5. The CHeF is
Going
(The chief is going.) (Picture of chief saying "By"--spelled backwards)

6. The - PePoe - Are
DAIiNG
(The people are dying.)

7. The JuPS-ARE
WENiNG.)
(The Japs? Subs? are winning.)

8. The AMRKiNS WAN
WOLD WAR 2
the ENG
(The Americans won World War II. The End.)

INTENDED NARRATIVE

Cover: My Thanksgiving Book

1. WiNTR Wiht the
Pilgriams BRRRRRR
(Winter with the Pilgrims. BRRRRRR)

2. The Pilgums.
HaD a
Faest.
(The Pilgrims had a feast.)

3. The Pilgum's
HaD a Lot oF
FooD.

4. The pilgum's
MeT
The
indein's
(The Pilgrims met the Indians.)

5. AT first thye
thot that
The inDein's
wer dangoris.
(At first they thought the Indians were dangerous.)

6. Then the indein's tolD
them thye
wer Not
going to Do
enyThing.
(Then the Indians told them they were not doing to do anything.)

7. Then winter
came IT was
CoLD.

8. I can a
mangen How
much work
They HaD to Do.
even The
Wemen HaD
to chop Wuod.

(I can imagine how much work they had to do. Even the women had to chop wood.) (Picture of woman chopping tree down, shouting "TemBer")

9. The men even

HaD to swep

(The men even had to sweep.) (Picture of man sweeping, saying "YUC")

10. in the suimmer
it is so HoT
they Got
SWeting.

(In the summer it is so hot they got sweating.)

The End

EARLY NARRATIVE

Cover: the VapiPe
(The Vampire)

1. a VapiRe is
ataciNg a Prsin
(A vampire is attacking a person.)

2. and he cLD hm
(And he killed him.)

3. and he FLOUU ae
(And he flew away.)

4. and uat
ava
and he FLoo
oVER The TreeS.
(And went away and he flew over the trees.)

5. Teh ad.
(The End.)

PERSONAL NARRATIVE - PRESENT TENSE

Cover: The BeCH BOOK
(The Beach Book)

1. I AM GOING TOO the Bech.
(I am going to the beach.)

2. I AM At the BecH.
(I am at the beach.)

3. I AM IN the Warter.
(I am in the water.)

4. I Love the BecH!
(I love the beach!)

5. I Am iN the CArer
(I am in the car.)

6. I Am LEving the Bech

7. I AM At MiN haWs
(I am at my house.)

PERSONAL NARRATIVE - DIALOGUE

Cover: Me enD Mi MoM
Go too the MoosAM
(Me and My Mom Go to the Museum)

1. MoM MoM CAN WE GO too the MOOZAM
Yes
("Mom, mom, can we go to the museum?" "Yes.")

2. GiAt riAte Ar riAt MOM
CAN You tiy MiN chooz
("Get ready." "All right, Mom. Can you tie my shoes?")

3. Ar we Al moost tAr
NO
("Are we almost there?" "No.")

4. NiY rA we TAr
Yes see rictover sir SiViS MooZAM
("Now are we there?" "Yes, see right over there? Science Museum.")

5. Mom WiAr rA the
DA A SooR
TiAr ra AOver Taer
("Mom, where are the dinosaurs?" "They're right over there.")

6. WAer the Bos room
SAt iwotc A rit
Ger Bos
("Where's the Boy's room?" ? ? all right. Girls Boys)

7. Mom WAt tim is it
6
("Mom, what time is it?" "6")

8. Mom CAN I rist iN the BiAc
YES
("Mom, can I ride in the back?" "Yes.")

9. Mom ra w hom vat Yes
("Mom, are we home yet?" "Yes.")

SPORTS NARRATIVE - EARLY

Cover: The oreos Ade ReD SOX
(The Orioles and Red Sox)

1. The oreos MaD a HOM RUn
And the ReD Sox LOST The ball
(The Orioles made a home run and the Red Sox lost the ball.)

2. The ReD Sox Are wiNNinG
(The Red Sox are winning.) (Scoreboard shows "Oreo 1; Radsox 50," with numbers backwards)

3. 100 1
RaDsox oraos
(no text, just picture of scoreboard)

4. The ReD sox MAD a HOM run
(The Red Sox made a home run.)

5. The reD sox wane.
(The Red Sox won.)

SPORTS NARRATIVE (May)

Cover: the ReD Sox PLAY The CuBS
Cubs Red Sox

1. the Red Sox Hit the Ball StRat in the aiR.
(The Red Sox hit the ball straight in the air.)

2. Now JiM Rice Hits A tRiPLe
FoR the ReD Sox.

3. Now the CuBS Hit A Home Run
Cubs Red Sox
1 2

4. Now the Red Sox Hit a Home Run.
Cubs Red Sox
1 3

5. Jim Rice SlieDS at HOMe base
and caches the ball
(Jim Rice slides at home base and catches the ball.)

6. Dwight Evans Hits a HOMe Run!
Cubs Red Sox
1 4

7. NoW the cubs Hit A Home Run.

8. Now Dwight Eveans Hits
the Ball and Gets
a triple.

9. Now the Cubs Get a Home
Run to.

10. But NOW Gorge Scott
Hits A Home Run. and the
game is oveR.
and the Red Sox win 7-3.
The End.

"CAMELOT" - BOY'S VIEW

Cover: The war of Kights
(The War of Knights)

1. The Horse is walkeing in the caseL
(The horse is walking in the castle.)

2. The Kingt is Geting rady for the fight.
(The king is getting ready for the fight.)

3. Thay are Haveing The FiTht.
(They are having the fight.)

4. The BaD guy KiLLD The GooD Guy.
(The bad guy killed the good guy.)

5. the GooD guys wun.
(The good guys won.)

6. But the BaD guys are Fighting Agin.
(But the bad guys are fighting again.)

7. the GooD guy shawt the Flag.
(The good guy shot the flag.)

8. The GooD guy all most KillD THe BaD guy.
But The BaD guy Got away.
(The good guy almost killed the bad guy. But the bad guy got away.)

9. But The GooD guys wun.
The End

"CAMELOT" - GIRL'S VIEW

Cover: Camellot - a plase
wer things hapin.
(Camelot - A Place Where Things Happen)

1. I am sgegrd.
("I am scared.")

2. I am sgeds.
I do not wut to
maree the king.
("I am scared. I do not want to marry the king.")

3. Oh no the king.
is coneing out.
of the casll.
("Oh no, the king is coming out of the castle.")

4. I hear sumthing.
("I hear something.")

5. I love you.
I love you too.
("I love you." "I love you, too.")

6. Gwenuveer Gut
mareed to the
prins.
(Guinevere got married to the prince.)

NON-NARRATIVE ATTRIBUTE

Cover: The Book
aBout My FemLee
(The Book about My Family)

1. My muther
is wrkinG
(My mother is working.)

2. My muthr
is tirDe
av wrKing
(My mother is tired of working.) (Picture of mother lying on a bed, with girl standing by bed, smiling)

3. I am
GoinG to
SCOOL
(I am going to school.)

4. I am GoinG to
Be smaret
(I am going to be smart.)
The End

NON-NARRATIVE ATTRIBUTE (written by two girls)

Cover: This Book is aBuot Me and Shima
(This Book is about Me and Shima)

1. Me and Shima
are Good fres.
(Me and Shima are good friends.)

2. Me and Shima
are sckuteing
(Me and Shima are skating.)

3. Me and Shima
are makinge
a picHr.
(Me and Shima are making a picture.)

4. We go to
SCOOL to gethr
(We go to school together.)

5. Me and Shima are washing Hans.
The End
(Me and Shima are washing hands. The End)

NON-NARRATIVE ATTRIBUTE (title and topic different)

Cover: Book ABout autobiography

1. BooK ABout autobigraphy
(This page was set up as a title page.)

2. I HAV A CAT.

3. I useto HA VEA Dog.
(I used to have a dog.)

4. But we GAVE Him
AWAe.
(But we gave him away.) (Picture of dog riding off in back of truck)

5. I uos too HAV A
PArAKet too.
(I used to have a parakeet too.)

6. My mom
SeD we COD NOT
HAV A PUPPY
BeCOS nowon
WOD BE HOME to
take cer of HiM.
(My mom said we could not have a puppy because no one would be home to take care of him.)

7. Good! BY!!!!

NON-NARRATIVE LIST

Cover: MOichiNe Book
(Machine Book)

1. Cae machine
(Cooky machine)

2. KLOWS moichiNe
(Clothes machine)

3. PLN moicHiNe
(Plane machine)

4. GLW moichiNe
(Glue machine)

5. PAPR MOichiNe
(Paper machine)

NON-NARRATIVE "PICTURE ALBUM"

Cover: The ounDer Sea WrolD
(The Under Sea World)

1. This is a sailfish
it's Fin is like a sale.
(This is a sailfish. Its fin is like a sail.)

2. This is a Prana
it ates mete.
(This is a piranha. It eats meat.)

3. This is a Fish and craB.

4. The Elichrick Eel is Dngres.
(The electric eel is dangerous.)

5. The sea gull flits over The sea.

6. Peopol swimm iN water.
(People swim in water.)

7. The octPuos Has 10 arams.
(The octopus has 10 arms.)

NON-NARRATIVE INSTRUCTIONS

Cover: Hoy to make Kotrplrs
(How to Make Caterpillars)

1. You need KroDBoD AND
string and siszrs.
(You need cardboard and string and scissors.)

2. Kat a skar pes ni the mitl av the KrBoD.
(Cut a square piece in the middle of the cardboard.)

3. Rap the string a rown
the KoBoD like theis.
ftee times and DOW it
six times.
(Wrap the string around the cardboard like this. 3 times and do it six times.)

4. rap a littl pees uv
the string like this
(Wrap a little piece of the string like this.)

5. wn you are al Don
it wil Bee a Katlpilr
(When you are all done it will be a caterpillar.)

NON-NARRATIVE INSTRUCTIONS

Cover: Betr Riding
(Better Riding)

1. First thing is to stedee the horse.
(First thing is to steady the horse.)

2. Secint thing is to put yror hand on
the satl. Thats wot a satl is.
(Second thing is to put your hand on the saddle.
That's what a saddle is.)

3. Third thing is to pull yurr self up
vere Krfalee as you can.
(Third thing is to pull yourself up very carefully
as you can.)

4. Forth thing is to stat woking on the hors.
(Fourth thing is to start walking on the horse.)

5. Fith thing-you can start troting.
"Good-by."
"Good-by."
(Fifth thing - you can start trotting.)

NON-NARRATIVE INFORMATION

Cover: FloWeR'S
flower's
floweR's
floweR's
or Things
That GROW

1. When the sun shin's
Down on the Flower

2. The flower
GRwoo's
(The flower grows.)

3. When the sun
shin's DowN
on the TRee
the tree
Grwoo's to.
(When the sun shines down on the tree, the tree grows too.)

4. EvriThing That LiVs
GRWoo's
(Everything that lives grows.)

5. All The
Thing
Here
GRWoo
(All the things here grow.) (Picture of boy, cat, dog, flower, tree)

6. All the thinG GRwoo
wthe water
(All the things grow with water.)

7. Monster GRWoo to
(Monster grows too.)

8. This Dosint
GRwoo
(This doesn't grow.)(Picture of house)

9. Dos this GRWoo?
Yes it GRwoo!
(Does this grow? Yes, it grows!)(Picture of dog)

10. Water hlep us GRwoo
(Water helps us grow.)(Picture of rain)

11. everything can
GRwoo that way
(Everything can grow that way.)

NON-NARRATIVE "ESSAY"

Cover: Nacher
(Nature)

1. The Shark is NAcher.
(The shark is nature.)

2. the thEE is NACHer.
(The tree is nature.)

3. Pepol ARe NACher to.
(People are nature too.)

4. Theis is A SPiDer WAB
A spiDEr-is-NACHer to
The END
(This is a spider web. A spider is nature too.
The End)

NON-NARRATIVE ESSAY OR COMMENTARY
(with touches of personal narrative)

Cover: A Book ABout CAt's

1. CAt's DrinGK
all tHe time
thea bont.
Stop.
(Cats drink all the time. They don't stop.)

2. tHea allso
pllye with
sринG Lootse.
(They also play with string lots.)

3. tHea allso sleep on the
ratee Ator mor tHne
thea SHood too
(They also sleep on the radiator more than they should, too.)

4. Well thea bont boother you for A sekint
Bot Aftr thea tAK ovre the Holl hows
(Well, they don't bother you for a second, but after they take over the whole house.)

5. its nhic to tAke them for woocs too
(It's nice to take them for walks too.)

6. i all most forgot
its my BrthDAy
i hope i Get A CAT i! bib! i! bib!
(I almost forgot. It's my birthday. I hope I get a cat. I did! I did!)

7. I Have to Feeb My New CAt. Here is
Yore LONCH. (I have to feed my new cat. Here is your lunch.)

8. theat's wot's A matr with them
thea Have BABY'S
(That's what's the matter with them. They have babies.)

9. i ket onDr
sed it
CAt's HAVe
BABY's all the Time
(I can't understand it. Cats have babies all the time.)

10. i Gec aLL
Have to keep them
(I guess I'll have to keep them.)

10. Lets Go for
A wok. Cat's
The
END
(Let's go for a walk, cats. The End)

NON-NARRATIVE ESSAY (Extended territory)

Cover: The God Book

1. I like God he gav us wadr
(I like God. He gave us water.)

2. God GAV us MOMMYS ND DaDs to HLPus
(God gave us mommies and dads to help us.)

3. God GAV us swemen poose to sem.
(God gave us swimming pools to swim in.)

4. God GAV us THE WRLDe
(God gave us the world.)

5. God GAVE us HAVEIN
(God gave us Heaven.)

6. DEDA GOD GEV US CRNAVL'S NO
PePul BELT CRNAVL'S
(Did God give us carnivals? No, people built carnivals.)

7. God is GOOD.

8. God is Nise.
(God is nice.)

9. God MAYDE GESES
(God made Jesus.)

10. GOD GAV us homes
(God gave us homes.)

11. God is VAREY Nis
(God is very nice.)

12. GOD LOVES US

13. GOD is HAPPEY BEKOS PEPUL are
UOOZEN THE Wrld HOOW heu
WONTID TAM TO UOOZ it
(God is happy because people are using the world how he wanted them to use it.)

14. GOD LOVES ME

POETRY

"Poems about Valentine's Day"

1. Kitty, oh Kitty
   You are my valentine.
   Whenever I see you,
   you fill me with joy.

2. Valentine
   I see you.
   You make me happy.

3. Valentine, I see you.
   You make me happy.
   I love you, Valentine.
   You are my valentine.

4. Valentine, Valentine.
   I love you, Valentine.

5. The moonlight skies
   Over every Valentine and me.

6. Blue skies of rivers
   with Valentines floating in it.

7. Sweeping winds that sweep
   You and me and valentines.

8. Valentines.....and me.

9. Roses and Valentines
   in the air.

(original test lost - only "published" version remains)

BEST COPY AVAILABLE